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**THE IMPACT OF STRATEGIC PLANNING INVOLVEMENT ON EMPLOYEE
ENGAGEMENT IN A FEDERAL PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY**

**A Research Project
Presented to the Faculty of
The George L. Graziadio
School of Business and Management
Pepperdine University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
in
Organization Development**

**by
Robert T. Ziegler**

August 2017

This research project, completed by

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under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the faculty of The George L. Graziadio School of Business and Management in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Date: August 2017

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of involvement in strategic planning initiatives on employee perceptions, change behaviors, and engagement within one federal public health agency. Forty-six staff completed a survey and 12 completed an interview. Both strategy participants and non-participants reported neutral to positive scores for perceived value and benefits of the strategic initiatives, discretionary change behaviors, and engagement factors, with few significant differences. All participants reported strong levels of engagement and that strategy participation would or did increase their levels of engagement. Public agencies should carefully consider when, how, and where to deploy employee-led strategy teams. Specifically, this research indicates that the involvement of employees in strategy for engagement purposes only should be avoided. Additional research is needed to extend and confirm these findings.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Employee engagement has been identified as a powerful organizational lever for increasing employee productivity and improving various organizational performance measures (Bates, 2004; Marelli, 2011; Richman, 2006). Erickson (2005) asserted that improving engagement is the single most powerful lever organizations can apply for enhancing productivity because engagement is a state in which workers invest their psychic energy in their work.

Although employee engagement is noted for driving organizational results, questions remain about how this valuable organizational currency actually can be cultivated. Some factors shown to increase engagement include intrinsic motivators such as employees' interest in their work, alignment between their work and their values and sense of personal purpose, and psychological safety (Kahn, 1990; Marelli, 2011). In addition, extrinsic motivators such as a compelling organizational mission, trusted leadership, efficient work processes, and effective performance management also have been shown to increase engagement (Marelli, 2011).

Little research has been conducted, however, on the engagement effects of involving employees in organizational improvement processes—specifically, strategic planning activities. It is assumed but not verified that involving employees in these activities will lead to higher (and hopefully sustained) levels of engagement than their counterparts not involved in these activities. This study examines this assumption by evaluating the engagement consequences of strategic planning involvement in a population of federal public agency employees.

Research Purpose

This study examined the impact of involvement in a strategic planning initiative on employee perceptions, change behaviors, and engagement within one federal public health agency. Four research questions were examined:

1. What is the impact of involvement in strategic planning initiatives on employees' perceived organizational value of the strategic initiatives?
2. What is the impact of involvement in strategic planning initiatives on employees' perceived personal benefits of the strategic initiatives?
3. What is the impact of involvement in strategic planning initiatives on employees' demonstration of discretionary change behaviors?
4. What is the impact of involvement in strategic planning initiatives on employees' engagement?

Study Setting

The Division of Sanitation Facilities Construction (DSFC) is a program within the Indian Health Service responsible for the design and construction of sanitation facilities for American Indian/Alaska Native communities throughout the United States. Sanitation facilities include drinking water treatment plants, water distribution lines, wastewater treatment plants, individual septic systems, and solid waste landfills. With an annual operating budget of approximately \$180 million (including contributions by partner funding agencies), the DSFC Program serves more than 550 federally recognized tribes. In alignment with the Indian Health Service organizational structure, the DSFC Program is divided into 12 geographically distinct and relatively autonomous Area Offices.

Beginning in 2005, the DSFC Program embarked on an ambitious cycle of strategic planning. The program involved multi-day planning workshops that included Program leadership, Area-level leadership, mid-level managers, and technical engineering staff. Over the course of approximately 2 years, these planning efforts generated a comprehensive set of

strategic initiatives or “vision elements.”¹ Each of these initiatives was then assigned to a cross-sectional team consisting of employees from different managerial levels and geographic Areas. In the first round of strategic work efforts, more than 13 different teams were chartered by organizational leadership to research and design strategy for a number of organizational issues, including project management, customer service, knowledge management, and operations and maintenance of sanitation systems, to name a few. All teams began their efforts from a single vision statement (“DSFC has a project management culture”) and developed well-informed strategies that, when implemented, would support this vision statement.

The teams completed their deliverables; in several cases, a second round of team activity then commenced. A third round of team activity was chartered for one or two strategic initiatives. Approximately 140 individuals from across the DSFC Program (out of a total workforce of 400) served on these teams. Specific team activities included research, benchmarking of other organizations, employee surveys, facilitated brainstorming workshops, and the conceptual design and piloting of many new processes, products, and improvements for the Program. In several cases, vision element teams assisted SFC Headquarters staff with the implementation of improvements stemming from these efforts.

For the purposes of this study, the “intervention group” consists of DSFC employees (ranging from mid-level managers to front-line engineering staff) that participated on the vision element teams from roughly 2005 to 2007. The “control group” consists of employees that did not participate on these teams during this time period but were present within the organization during these strategic initiatives.

¹ These planning workshops followed the strategic planning methodology of the Institute of Culture Affairs (ICA).

Significance of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine potential relationship between involvement in strategic planning activities and employee engagement behaviors. Findings and conclusions from this study may help inform leadership decisions concerning how employee-led strategic planning efforts are structured and implemented. Study results also may inform the degree and extent of communication associated with strategic planning initiatives, particularly with regard to the context and benefits of these initiatives for the organization and its members. In addition, the study highlights the specific employee engagement behaviors that are most and least influenced by involvement in strategic planning activities, which also may inform the design of employee-led strategic planning initiatives. Finally, study findings and conclusions add to the growing body of literature related to employee engagement.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 introduces the study along with the research purpose. Background information on the study organization and its strategic planning efforts is described and the significance of the study is identified.

Chapter 2 examines strategic planning literature, with emphasis on the public sector, to elaborate strategic planning processes and methods of involving employees in these processes. Employee engagement literature is then reviewed, including definition of the construct, and identification of the engagement variables most likely to be impacted by involvement in a strategic planning process.

Chapter 3 describes the methods used in this study. The research design is discussed first, including the basis for selecting study participants as well as the data collection and analysis methods used.

Chapter 4 presents the study results. Participant demographics, survey reliability statistics, and quantitative and qualitative findings for each research question are reported.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings of this study, including conclusions, recommendations and implications for public agency design and implementation of strategy, study limitations, and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This study examined the impacts of involvement in the strategic planning process on employee engagement within a federal public health agency. To establish a platform for the research question, strategic planning literature and studies, with emphasis on public agencies, are reviewed. Literature and research on middle managers' involvement in planning processes also are discussed. From this platform, employee engagement literature is reviewed, focusing on those aspects of engagement that might be influenced by involvement in strategy implementation. Antecedents of employee engagement also are discussed.

Strategic Planning in the Public Sector

Strategic planning has been defined as “a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it” (Bryson, 2011, p. 7). For organizations that have become adept in this practice, strategic planning “permeates the culture of an organization, creating an almost intuitive sense of where it is going and what is important” (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992, p. 234).

Typically, strategic planning involves the following activities: clarifying mission and values, developing a vision of the future, analyzing internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis), identifying high-level strategic issues or initiatives, developing strategic goals and objectives that address these issues or initiatives, and developing action plans to achieve these goals and objectives (Poister & Streib, 2005).

Organizations that routinely engage in strategic planning activities realize a number of benefits. In a survey of more than 500 municipal agency managers, Poister and Streib (2005) found that the following benefits were cited most commonly as a result of strategic planning activities: enhancing employees' focus on organizational goals; defining clear program priorities; improving communication with external stakeholder groups; improving decision-making ability regarding programs, systems, and resources; building a positive organizational culture; and improving the ability to deliver high-quality public health services.

Despite its purported benefits, strategic planning also is the subject of criticism. Chief among these critics is Mintzberg (1994), who claims that most strategic planning efforts are ineffective because they fail to link themselves to performance measurement and resource allocation processes in the organization. Mintzberg has claimed that strategic planning, due to its reliance on formalized processes that reduce managerial input, has actually impeded the critical strategic thinking required for an organization's successful response to external conditions.

With the advent of the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA), federal agencies have been actively engaged in strategic planning activities for the last two decades. The Act requires that each federal agency develop a strategic plan, an annual performance plan, and an annual performance report. Together, these documents are intended to provide a management tool that informs Agency-level decision making as well as Congressional resource allocation (Long & Franklin, 2004).

GPRA mandates a bottom-up approach to strategy-making, wherein input from internal and external stakeholders at various levels of the organization are sought during the development of the required documents. The intention of this bottom-up approach is

to create a decentralized process in which strategy and policy are derived from the front-line interactions between agency employees and their customers (Lester & Stewart, 1996). In keeping with the ideology of reinventing government, the power to offer input and set strategy is given to the lowest level organization members as well as to external stakeholders.

Despite the intention of GPRA, some research indicates that the embedded top-down governance model of federal agencies and the one-size-fits-all policy of the Act overrides the espoused intention of bottom-up involvement. In a study of 14 Federal cabinet-level departments, Long and Franklin (2004) found that only five of these agencies met the criteria of a decentralized and integrated approach to strategy development. In addition, more than half the agencies reported that stakeholders are disinterested in participating in the development of GPRA documents. Challenges encountered by agencies in GPRA implementation include lack of systems alignment, lack of resources, cultural challenges such as resistance to change, and the lack of valid and reliable data. These challenges echo Mintzberg's (1994) criticisms of strategic planning.

Despite the difficulty federal agencies encounter in realizing the bottom-up aspirations of GPRA, research has demonstrated that the involvement of organizational members other than the executive team in strategy formulation has the potential for improving organizational performance. For example, a wide body of research now exists that validates the critical roles that middle managers play in strategy formulation and implementation. Wooldridge and Floyd (1989) constructed and validated a model that middle-level manager involvement in strategy enhances organizational performance through two means: improved decision making (thus leading to superior strategies) and

higher strategic consensus (thus leading to improved implementation). In a follow-on study, the authors observed that middle managers in boundary-spanning positions reported higher levels of strategic influence activity. Firm performance was associated with more uniform levels of downward strategic influence on the part of middle management (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997). In a study of 185 organizations, Anderson (2004) highlighted the role of middle managers in supporting a “radically decentralized” organizing principle. For large organizations in dynamic environments, the researcher found that a wider distribution of strategic decision-making authority is positively correlated with organizational performance.

Employee Engagement

Definitions of employee engagement abound in the literature and popular management press. Most definitions address two common attributes: an internal motivation state and external behavior that is a consequence of this internal state. For example, Marelli (2011) defined engagement as the “high level of motivation to perform well at work, combined with passion for the work and a feeling of personal connection to the team and organization” (p. 5). Macey, Schneider, Barbera, and Young (2009), prominent researchers on the topic, defined engagement as “an individual’s sense of purpose and focused energy, evident to others in the display of personal initiative, adaptability, effort, and persistence directed towards organizational goals” (p. 7). A third researcher defines engagement as a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74).

Several conclusions can be made based on these definitions. First, it is clear that engagement is an individual-level construct and is related to individuals’ attitudes,

intentions, and behaviors (Saks, 2006). These outcomes must be achieved before the organization can recognize any benefits.

Second, engagement is related to an internal energy state, described by one researcher as two elements of psychic energy and behavioral energy (Macey et al., 2009). Psychic energy engagement concerns the internal state of the employee and relates to the amount of focus, initiative, and purpose an engaged employee brings to the task at hand. This implies forward momentum rather than mere contentment (i.e., job satisfaction) with the current state.

Behavioral energy and engagement can be observed and manifests itself in several ways: Employees think more proactively; demonstrate persistence; expand their thinking and acting beyond their job descriptions; take ownership for their own personal development, such as identifying and developing skills that will benefit both themselves and the organization; and exhibit adaptability amidst organizational change (Macey et al., 2009).

Third, engagement can be thought of as an exchange between the individual and the organization, consistent with social exchange theory. As the individual experiences benefits and resources from the organization, the employee reciprocates with engagement attitudes and behavior (Saks, 2006). It follows that employees will continue to exhibit engagement attitudes and behaviors based on the continuation of favorable reciprocal exchanges.

Engaged employees benefit their organizations in a number of ways. Research in the public and private sectors demonstrates that workforce engagement is significantly correlated with positive organizational outcomes including higher productivity, increased profitability, lower levels of sick leave use, fewer complaints of unfair treatment, less

work time missed due to workplace injury or illness, lower levels of attrition, and higher levels of customer satisfaction (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004; Gorman & Gorman, 2006; Koob, 2008; Macey et al., 2009; Nierle, Ford, & Shugrue, 2008).

With specific reference to the federal sector, engaged workforces can lead to lowered use of sick leave and a decrease in the average rate of lost work time cases due to injury and illness (Nierle et al., 2008). In addition, agencies with higher employee engagement levels score higher on the Office of Management and Budget's Program Assessment Rating Tool, a measure of how well an agency does in its strategic planning, performance management, and performance measurement.

Due to the many and varied benefits of engagement, it is important to understand what promotes employee engagement. Engagement appears to be dependent on two general factors: the employee's internal state and the external organizational conditions surrounding the employee. Internal or intrinsic engagement factors rely on the employee's psychological state such as conscientiousness, interest in the work, centrality of the work to his or her life, and personal satisfaction gained from the work (Marelli, 2011). Extrinsic engagement antecedents can include any factor that positively influences the employee's internal psychological state, such as compelling organizational mission, trusted leadership, efficient work processes, effective performance management, management communication, and supportive supervisor behavior (Marelli, 2011).

Employee involvement in organizational strategy making activities also may enhance engagement, given Crim and Seijts's (2006) assertion that employee involvement in decision-making may enhance engagement. This assumption also is consistent with theories of reciprocal exchanges (Saks, 2006), if the employee considers

it favorable to be involved in decisions that will affect organizational processes and outcomes for years to come.

Moreover, Sonenshein and Dholakia (2012) posited in their research that employee engagement and support organizational change were associated with two factors: (a) *strategy worldview*, defined to managers “creating an overall plan for the organization that helps lend coherence to change for employees and allows them to understand why they must make adjustments” (p. 3) and (b) *benefits finding*, defined as employees viewing the change “as having more benefits relative to downsides while constructing change as the positive emotions of energy, optimism, and confidence” (p. 4).

The researchers studied a case of strategic change within two divisions of a Fortune 500 retailer (Sonenshein & Dholakia, 2012). The strategic initiatives included location remodels, brand strategy reformulation, expansion of products, and updates to technology and work routines. The researchers made three conclusions based on their analysis of employee survey data: (a) the greater an employee’s exposure to managerial communication, the higher an employee’s level of strategy worldview and benefits finding; (b) employee benefits finding played a more significant role than strategy worldview in determining the employee’s level of affective commitment to the strategic changes; and (c) greater levels of affective commitment to change led to increased levels of discretionary change behavior, defined as “behavior beyond the explicit requirements of change to make it successful” (p. 5).

The literature of engagement suggests that involving employees in so-called hands-on strategic research, design, and implementation activates two powerful engagement antecedents. The first is sense-making, which manifests as increased cognition of the organizational value of the strategies that the employee has been

chartered to create. In other words, it is assumed that a direct and insider relationship with a new strategy will enhance an employee's recognition of the value of this strategy for the organization. The second antecedent is benefit finding, which also would manifest as increased cognition, this time relating to the personal employee benefits to be accrued from the strategic change.

This study proposed that experiencing these two antecedents would trigger higher levels of engagement in those organizational members involved in strategy making, as compared to employees not involved in the activities. This result was hypothesized to occur due to perceived favorable reciprocal exchange and increase in discretionary change behavior. The next chapter describes the research methods used to conduct this study.

Chapter 3

Methods

This study examined the impact of involvement in a strategic planning initiative on employee perceptions, change behaviors, and engagement within one federal public health agency. Four research questions were examined:

1. What is the impact of involvement in strategic planning initiatives on employees' perceived organizational value of the strategic initiatives?
2. What is the impact of involvement in strategic planning initiatives on employees' perceived personal benefits of the strategic initiatives?
3. What is the impact of involvement in strategic planning initiatives on employees' demonstration of discretionary change behaviors?
4. What is the impact of involvement in strategic planning initiatives on employees' engagement?

This chapter reports the methods used in the study. The research design and procedures related to participant selection, ethical considerations, data collection, and data analysis are described.

Research Design

A sequential mixed-methods design was used in this study. This design uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gathering and analyzing data (Creswell, 2013). Applying this combination of methods generated a larger body of data to allow for corroboration of findings related to the research questions.

Participant Selection

Participants were drawn from the DSFC Program described in Chapter 1. Two types of participants were available:

1. Those who had been actively involved in a strategic initiative team either as a team leader or team member for the duration of the team's existence (average

team lifespan was 18 months). These individuals comprised the intervention group for the present study.

2. Those who had not been actively involved in a strategic initiative team. These individuals comprised the control group.

The researcher selected study participants in a stratified manner so that the groups would be equal in terms of length of service, position, and office location. Specifically, for each team member identified for inclusion, a control member was identified based on similar lengths of service (± 5 years) and employment within the same Area Office. This screening resulted in a total pool of 75 potential survey participants.

Following participant selection, the survey and overall research effort was communicated to designated survey participants via email by the DSFC Program Director, Rear Admiral Ronald Ferguson, PE (retired; see Appendix A). The researcher then sent a follow-up email to each study candidate to explain the survey and provide an electronic copy of the consent form (see Appendix B).

Upon receipt of a signed consent form, the survey link was provided to the study participant. Several email reminders were sent to potential study participants by the researcher to generate as robust response as possible. The online survey (see Appendix C) was open for respondents from April 2014 to June 2014, at which point it was closed for further participation. This process resulted in a total number of 46 respondents who signed the consent form and completed the online survey, representing a 61% response rate from the original pool of 75 potential participants.

Ethical Procedures

The researcher completed the National Institutes of Health training course on Human Participants Protection in 2013 and the study was conducted within the oversight of the Pepperdine University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher also contacted the

Department of Health and Human Services IRB for approval to conduct this research (the Indian Health Service is an agency with the Department of Health and Human Services).

After review of the proposed research, the Department of Health and Human Services IRB concluded this study fell outside the IRB requirements and could proceed without the Board's approval.

Confidentiality was maintained in this study by storing all hard copy data and consent forms in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher, storing all electronic data generated by this study on the researcher's password-protected personal laptop computer, assigning each participant a numerical code, and destroying all data and personal information related to the study upon completion of this research.

Data Collection

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from the participants during this research study using an online survey and telephone interviews. Details on these data collection methods are presented in the following sections.

Survey. Quantitative data were gathered using an original 27-item online survey created for this study (see Appendix C). Answer choices for each item ranged on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items were organized in five subscales:

1. Managerial communication. The first question asked participants to indicate how well informed they feel by their managers of DSFC Program strategic improvement initiatives. It was anticipated that employees whose manager actively communicates strategy would have more positive perceptions of strategic initiatives (Sonenshein & Dholakia, 2012) and may have higher engagement (Macey et al., 2009). This item was designed to determine whether the groups were balanced in terms of the degree to which they felt well informed by management regarding the DSFC Program strategic improvement initiatives.
2. Perceived value of strategic initiatives. Seven items (Questions 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 12, and 15) measured employees' perceptions of the general value of the strategic

initiatives. For example, Item 3 asked participants to indicate their agreement with, “Strategic initiatives and change enable the Program to use more resources efficiently and effectively.” Involvement in strategic initiative activities was anticipated to have a positive influence on employees’ perceived value of strategic initiatives. These items were created based on Sonenshein and Dholakia’s (2012) assertions that managers’ creation of an overall plan for the organization helps lend coherence to change for employees and allows them to understand why they must make adjustments.

3. Perceived benefits of strategic initiatives. Four items (Questions 5, 7, 8, and 9) measured the specific benefits employees believed would result from the strategic initiatives. For example, Item 5 asked participants to indicate their agreement with, “DSFC strategic initiatives will increase our ability to complete sanitation projects on time, on budget, and with appropriate scope.” These items were created based on the work of several researchers that perceiving benefits of an organizational change is associated with viewing the change as having more benefits than drawbacks, especially tangible benefits vital to the organization (Feldman & Russell, 1999; Sonenshein & Dholakia, 2012; Tellegen & Watson, 1999). Involvement in strategic initiative activities was anticipated to have a positive influence on employees’ perceived benefits of strategic initiatives.
4. Discretionary change behaviors. Six items (Questions 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20) measured employees’ demonstration of discretionary change behaviors. For example, Item 18 asked participants to indicate their agreement with, “I speak positively about DSFC strategic initiatives to my work colleagues.” These items were created based on the work of several researchers that employees’ support for change is demonstrated through behaviors such as perceiving benefits of an organizational change is associated with viewing the change as being associated with positive emotions and behaviors such as compliance with the change, optimism, confidence, and encouraging others to do the same (Feldman & Russell, 1999; Sonenshein & Dholakia, 2012; Tellegen & Watson, 1999). Involvement in strategic initiative activities was anticipated to have a positive influence on employees’ discretionary change behaviors.
5. Engagement. Nine items (Questions 6, 13, and 21-27) measured employees’ engagement level. For example, Item 23 asked participants to indicate their agreement with, “I am proud to tell others I work at my organization.” These items were created based on the work of several researchers who identified the components of engagement (Macey et al., 2009; Marelli, 2011; Nierle et al., 2008; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Involvement in strategic initiative activities was anticipated to have a positive influence on employees’ engagement.

Interviews. Telephone interviews were conducted in June 2017 with select survey participants to elaborate on survey findings. Interviewees were selected to attain a balance of control and intervention participants of roughly equal tenure and having equal representation

of office locations. After several rounds of email requests from the researcher, a total of 12 interviews were conducted. Nine of these interviews were conducted with strategic initiative participants; the remaining three interviews were conducted with control group employees. Each interview lasted 30-45 minutes.

Following a brief introduction, the interview script (see Appendix D) began by asking strategy participants to describe their experience in the DSFC improvement initiatives and reflect on how it affected them.

All participants were asked to share their understanding of how the DSFC improvement initiatives came into existence and whether they believed these improvement initiatives were relevant to the challenges and opportunities that currently exist for the DSFC Program. Participants also were asked whether they observe or experience any benefits from the initiatives relative to their own job performance.

Next, participants were asked to share how engaged they feel in their work, along with what factors most increase and decrease their work engagement. Finally, strategy participants were asked to share what effect, if any, they believe involvement in the DSFC improvement initiatives had on their work engagement. Control group participants were asked to speculate what effect, if any, they believe involvement in the DSFC improvement initiatives would have had on their work engagement.

Data Analysis

Frequency distributions for participant demographics (i.e., office location, position) and perception of being informed were compared for the control and intervention groups to determine whether the groups were balanced. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for each survey item and scale. These are reported for each group in the next

chapter. Independent sample t-tests were performed to determine whether the scores were significantly different between the control and intervention group.

Interview data for all participants were transcribed and organized by question.

Content analysis was used to examine the interview data according to the following steps:

1. The notes across all participants were reviewed to examine the range and depth of data gathered.
2. A start list of codes that appeared to reflect the data for each question was generated.
3. The data were coded using the start lists. Additional codes were created and applied as needed.
4. Following coding, the results were reviewed. Codes that were lightly used, not used at all, or whose wording did not appear to best reflect the data were revised and the interview notes were recoded accordingly.
5. The level of saturation was indicated for each code when code revision was complete. Saturation was indicated by counting the number of people in each group who reported each code.
6. A second coder reviewed the data analysis to determine whether the coding results appeared to be valid. The researcher and second coder compared their results and discrepancies were identified and resolved.

Summary

This study used a sequential mixed-method design of surveys and interviews to gather data about employees' perceptions of the strategic initiative, discretionary behavior, and engagement. Statistical and content analysis were applied to the data for generating results and validating the research questions. The next chapter reports the results.

Chapter 4

Results

This study examined the impact of involvement in a strategic planning initiative on employee perceptions, change behaviors, and engagement within one federal public health agency. Four research questions were examined:

1. What is the impact of involvement in strategic planning initiatives on employees' perceived organizational value of the strategic initiatives?
2. What is the impact of involvement in strategic planning initiatives on employees' perceived personal benefits of the strategic initiatives?
3. What is the impact of involvement in strategic planning initiatives on employees' demonstration of discretionary change behaviors?
4. What is the impact of involvement in strategic planning initiatives on employees' engagement?

This chapter reports the results. Participant demographics are presented first to evaluate the equivalency of the control and intervention groups. The control group consists of the 21 study participants who were not involved in DSFC Program strategic improvement initiatives. The intervention group consists of the 25 study participants who were involved in the DSFC Program strategic improvement initiatives. Survey results are then presented, followed by the interview results. The chapter closes with a summary.

Participant Demographics

A total of 46 respondents completed a survey: 21 in the control group and 25 in the intervention group. Of the 25 intervention group respondents, 15 (32.6%) were team members and 10 (21.7%) were team leads. Respondents were from 12 office locations (see Table 1). Attempts had been made to balance the groups based on location. The control group had disproportionately more participants from the Billings (9.5% v. 0.0%), Navajo (14.3% v. 8.0%), and Phoenix (14.3% v. 8.0%) Area Offices, whereas the

intervention group had disproportionately more participants from the Portland (16.0% v. 4.8%), Nashville (8.0% v. 0.0%), and Alaska (12.0% v. 4.8%), Area Offices as well as Headquarters (4.0% v. 0.0%).

Table 1

Survey Respondents' Office Locations

Location (Area Office)	Control <i>N</i> = 21	Intervention <i>N</i> = 25	Percent Difference
Portland	1 (4.8%)	4 (16.0%)	11.2%
Billings	2 (9.5%)	0 (0.0%)	9.5%
Nashville	0 (0.0%)	2 (8.0%)	8.0%
Alaska	1 (4.8%)	3 (12.0%)	7.2%
Navajo	3 (14.3%)	2 (8.0%)	6.3%
Phoenix	3 (14.3%)	2 (8.0%)	6.3%
California	2 (9.5%)	1 (4.0%)	5.5%
Headquarters	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.0%)	4.0%
Oklahoma	1 (4.8%)	2 (8.0%)	3.2%
Aberdeen	3 (14.3%)	3 (12.0%)	2.3%
Bemidji	3 (14.3%)	3 (12.0%)	2.3%
Albuquerque	2 (9.5%)	2 (8.0%)	1.5%

Survey respondents represented four positions within the organization (see Table 2). Attempts had been made to balance the groups based on position. The control group had disproportionately more field (33.3% v. 12.0%) and senior management (23.8% v. 8.0%) participants, whereas the intervention group had disproportionately more mid-level manager participants (68.0% v. 28.6%). The control and intervention groups had relatively equal proportion of senior field participants (14.3% v. 12.0%).

It was anticipated that employees whose manager actively communicates strategy would have more positive perceptions of strategic initiatives (Sonenshein & Dholakia, 2012) and may have higher engagement (Macey et al., 2009). Therefore, it was important to determine whether the groups were balanced in terms of the degree to which they felt

well informed by management regarding the DSFC Program strategic improvement initiatives. Table 3 shows that the groups were balanced in this regard, as 90.4% of the control group and 88.0% of the intervention group somewhat agreed or strongly agreed they were well-informed by their managers. An independent samples t-test confirmed the group means were not significantly different: $t(44) = .926, p > .05$.

Table 2

Survey Respondents' Positions

Position	Control <i>N</i> = 21	Intervention <i>N</i> = 25	Percent Difference
Field	7 (33.3%)	3 (12.0%)	21.3%
Senior field	3 (14.3%)	3 (12.0%)	2.3%
Mid-level manager	6 (28.6%)	17 (68.0%)	39.4%
Senior management	5 (23.8%)	2 (8.0%)	15.8%

Table 3

Survey Respondents' Perception of Being Informed

	Control <i>N</i> = 21	Intervention <i>N</i> = 25
Frequency Distributions		
Strongly disagree	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Somewhat disagree	1 (4.8%)	1 (4.0%)
Neither disagree or agree	1 (4.8%)	2 (8.0%)
Somewhat agree	12 (57.1%)	18 (72.0%)
Strongly agree	7 (33.3%)	4 (16.0%)
Mean	4.19	4.00
SD	0.75	0.65
t-test: $t(44) = .926, p = .359$		

1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 5 = strongly agree

In addition to the survey, 12 organization members were interviewed. Of these, nine had participated in the intervention and represented various sub-teams. It was observed that former strategic team members were far more responsive to interview requests from the researcher than control group members. In addition, several control

group participants had left the organization in the time between the survey and interviews.

Survey Reliability

The Cronbach's alpha statistic was calculated for each survey scale to estimate the survey's reliability. The results are presented in Table 4. All the scales showed high reliability. Discretionary Change Behaviors exhibited the lowest reliability ($\alpha = .812$) and Perceived Value of Strategic Initiatives exhibited the highest reliability ($\alpha = .899$). The survey overall exhibited even higher reliability ($\alpha = .934$). Nunnally (1978) advised that scales with a reliability of at least .70 are sufficiently reliable. Therefore, it can be concluded that the survey used in the present study provided a sufficiently consistent measure of the constructs examined.

Table 4

Reliability Analysis

Scale	Number of Items	Reliability
Perceived Value of Strategic Initiatives	7	.899
Perceived Benefits of Strategic Initiatives	4	.856
Discretionary Change Behaviors	6	.812
Engagement	9	.883
All	27	.934

Table 5 shows the correlations among the subscales. These statistics show that all four subscales are significantly and positively correlated to a moderate or strong degree: correlations ranged from .402 to .785 ($p < .01$).

Table 5
Correlation Among Subscales

Subscale	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1. Perceived Value of Strategic Initiatives	1			
2. Perceived Benefits of Strategic Initiatives	.785**	1		
3. Discretionary Change Behaviors	.502**	.490**	1	
4. Engagement	.435**	.402**	.669**	1

N = 46, **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Perceived Value of Strategic Initiatives

Seven items measured participants' perceived value of strategic initiatives (see Table 6). For the scale overall, the control group mean score was 4.18 (SD = .73), indicating agreement that the strategic initiative had value. Item scores ranged from 3.75 (SD = 1.12) for "I feel confident that the DSFC strategic initiatives will enhance my own effectiveness" to 4.76 (SD = .44) for "Today's environment requires that we continuously improve our Program."

The intervention group mean score also indicated agreement that the strategic initiative had value (M = 4.19, SD = .67). Item scores for the intervention group ranged from 3.88 (SD = .88) for "I feel confident in the future of the DSFC Program" to 4.28 (SD = .89) for "For the DSFC Program to remain successful in its mission, Program-wide strategic initiatives and changes are critical." An independent samples t-test showed that the item and overall scores for this scale were not significantly different when comparing the control and intervention group means.

Table 6***Perceived Value of Strategic Initiatives: Survey Results by Group***

Item	Control N = 21		Intervention N = 25		t	df	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Q2. For the DSFC Program to remain successful in its mission, Program-wide strategic initiatives and changes are critical.	4.33	0.80	4.28	0.89	.21	44	.83
Q3. Strategic initiatives and change enable the Program to use more resources efficiently and effectively.	4.14	0.85	4.32	0.90	-.68	44	.50
Q4. Today's environment requires that we continuously improve our Program.	4.76	0.44	4.64	0.49	.88	44	.38
Q10. I believe the DSFC strategic initiatives are the right changes for the organization.	4.14	0.91	4.16	0.80	-.07	44	.95
Q11. The DSFC Program will improve as a result of the current strategic initiatives.	3.90	1.18	4.16	0.94	-.82	44	.42
Q12. I feel confident in the future of the DSFC Program.	4.19	0.93	3.88	0.88	1.16	44	.25
Q15. I feel confident that the DSFC strategic initiatives will enhance my own effectiveness.	3.75	1.12	3.88	0.93	-.43	43	.67
Overall	4.18	.73	4.19	.67	-.02	44	.98

1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 5 = strongly agree

Interview participants were asked to report how the improvement initiatives were started (see Table 7). This question was asked to evaluate participants' strategy worldview, intended to reveal their beliefs about the need for change. One control participant and three intervention participants cited that the initiatives were initiated based on the personal vision of organizational leadership. The control participant stated, "Most of it came through the SFC Directors and some mid-level managers." One intervention participant explained:

The way I understand it was the vision of one particular leader, [name]. He had a vision of improving the program and wanted to get buy in for all the changes that he saw were needed. He didn't want to do it himself. He wanted to make it "sticky."

Two control participants and three intervention participants stated that the interventions were initiated by the organization for improvement purposes. A control participant stated, "The teams were set up and put together to improve the system,"

whereas an intervention participant stated, “I assumed it was people at HQ seeing problems and working to find solutions to these problems.”

Table 7

Interviewees’ Perceptions Regarding Initiation of Intervention

Initiation Method	Control N = 3	Intervention N = 9
Initiated by personal vision of organizational leadership	1	3
Initiated by organization for improvement purposes	2	3
Response to external directive		4
Unsure or other reasons	2	1

Note. Some participants cited multiple perceived reasons for strategy initiation

Four intervention participants but no control participants stated that the intervention was a response to an external directive. One intervention participant elaborated:

I have a pretty good handle on this as I was there from the very beginning. [The [Office of Management and Budget] Directive said we needed to do things differently and to develop a strategic plan. The high-level executives identified initial strategies and then handed these over to the mid-level managers. I was in California at the time and our SFC Director came back with a list of strategic initiatives and said “we need to develop all of these.”

Next, interview participants were asked to evaluate whether the improvement initiatives were relevant to the challenges and opportunities that existed for the program (see Table 8). This question was asked to again evaluate participants’ strategy worldview regarding the need for change. Notably, only one control participant, compared to five intervention participants, reported that the initiatives were relevant. One intervention participant, for example, reflected, “I think they are, yes. The deficiencies that existed in the program, we overcame these. My being aware of them has helped me with implementing these changes.”

Table 8***Interviewees' Perceived Relevance of Improvement Initiatives***

Relevance	Control N = 3	Intervention N = 9
Initiatives were relevant	1	5
Some initiatives were not well designed or implemented	2	4

Perceived Benefits of the Strategic Initiatives

Four items measured participants' perceived benefits of strategic initiatives (see Table 9). For the scale overall, the control group mean score was 3.94 (SD = .71), indicating neutrality to agreement. Item scores ranged from 3.76 (SD = .89) for "DSFC strategic initiatives will improve our relationships with our tribal customers and partners" to 4.10 (SD = .89) for "DSFC strategic initiatives will increase our ability to complete sanitation projects on time, on budget, and with appropriate scope."

Table 9***Perceived Benefits of Strategic Initiatives: Survey Results by Group***

Item	Control N = 21		Intervention N = 25		t	df	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Q5. DSFC strategic initiatives will increase our ability to complete sanitation projects on time, on budget, and with appropriate scope.	4.10	0.89	4.20	0.87	-.40	44	.69
Q7. DSFC strategic initiatives will improve our relationships with our tribal customers and partners.	3.76	0.89	3.96	0.74	-.83	44	.41
Q8. DSFC strategic initiatives will improve our relationships with our agency partners.	3.90	0.63	4.08	0.70	-.89	44	.38
Q9. DSFC strategic initiatives will improve the Program's ability to achieve positive health outcomes for the AI/AN communities we serve.	4.00	0.78	4.08	0.70	-.37	44	.72
Overall	3.94	.71	4.08	.59	-.73	44	.47

1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 5 = strongly agree

The intervention group mean score indicated agreement that the strategic initiatives produced benefits (M = 4.08, SD = .59). Item scores for the intervention group

ranged from 3.96 (SD = .74) for “DSFC strategic initiatives will improve our relationships with our tribal customers and partners” to 4.20 (SD = .87) for “DSFC strategic initiatives will increase our ability to complete sanitation projects on time, on budget, and with appropriate scope.” An independent samples t-test showed that the item and overall scores for this scale were not significantly different when comparing the control and intervention group means.

Interviewees also were asked to identify the benefits of the strategic initiatives to gauge their ability to predominantly identify benefits, rather than costs, to a planned change event. Two thirds of each group (2 control participants, 6 intervention participants) reported that the initiatives resulted in improved standardization of project management documentation across the areas (see Table 10). One control group member explained,

My personal and office benefit is that when we write documentation we have a good solid target to shoot for. . . . The process gives you an idea of what we need to look for and helps us get to finished documents. I would hope and think we’re getting more uniform with our project documents across the United States. Before [the initiative], areas and districts had their own idea of what to do. We are now a whole lot closer to the same format. When engineers transfer, there is now no need for a huge learning curve.

An intervention member added, “For my job specifically, having documents that are well laid out helps with scope creep. They create a higher success rate for projects.”

Notable differences also were evident in the responses. Specifically, all three control group participants but only two intervention participants stated that the initiative resulted in improved data systems. One control group member shared, “In the Great Plains Area with lots of individual sanitary systems, [the initiative] makes my life a lot easier. [Although it] took a long time to get information in place, now things work a whole lot easier.” Additional benefits noted by one third of the intervention group but not

mentioned by any control group participants included shortened project durations and increased engagement with customers.

Table 10

Interviewees' Perceived Benefits of Strategic Initiatives

Perceived Benefit	Control <i>N</i> = 3	Intervention <i>N</i> = 9
Improved standardization of project management documentation across the areas	2	6
Improved data systems	3	2
Shortened project durations		3
Increased engagement with customers		3
Efforts created a strategic path forward		1
Skill development		1

Participants' Discretionary Change Behaviors

Six items measured participants' discretionary change behaviors (see Table 11). For the scale overall, the control group mean score was 3.97 (*SD* = .62), indicating neutrality to agreement that they engaged in discretionary change behaviors. Item scores ranged from 3.95 (*SD* = .81) for "I have adjusted the way I perform my tasks as a result of the DSFC strategic initiatives" to 4.05 (*SD* = .92) for "I am confident the DSFC Program and its staff will be able to implement the strategic initiatives," "I speak positively about the DSFC strategic initiatives with our tribal and agency partners," and "I speak positively about the DSFC strategic initiatives with our tribal and agency partners."

The intervention group overall mean score also indicated neutrality to agreement that they engaged in discretionary change behaviors (*M* = 3.87, *SD* = .67). Item scores for the intervention group ranged from 3.44 (*SD* = .92) for "I am confident the DSFC Program and its staff will be able to implement the strategic initiatives" to 4.20 (*SD* = .82) for "I speak positively about the DSFC strategic initiatives with our tribal and

agency partners.” An independent samples t-test showed that one item score (Q14) was significantly different when comparing the control to the intervention group: $t(44) = 2.24$, $p < .05$. These results indicate that the intervention group participants were less confident than control group participants that the DSFC Program and its staff would be able to implement the strategic initiatives.

Table 11

Discretionary Change Behaviors: Analysis by Group

Item	Control N = 21		Intervention N = 25		t	df	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Q14. I am confident the DSFC Program and its staff will be able to implement the strategic initiatives.	4.05	0.92	3.44	0.92	2.24	44	.03*
Q16. I have been able to comply with the changes required by the DSFC strategic initiatives.	3.76	0.77	3.72	1.10	.15	44	.88
Q17. I have adjusted the way I perform my tasks as a result of the DSFC strategic initiatives.	3.95	0.81	3.92	0.81	.14	44	.89
Q18. I speak positively about DSFC strategic initiatives to my work colleagues.	4.05	0.87	4.00	0.91	.18	44	.86
Q19. I speak positively about the DSFC strategic initiatives with our tribal and agency partners.	4.05	0.92	4.20	0.82	-.60	44	.56
Q20. I try to overcome others' resistance to the changes resulting from the DSFC strategic initiatives.	3.95	0.87	3.96	0.98	-.03	44	.98
Overall	3.97	.62	3.87	.67	.49	44	.62

1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 5 = strongly agree; *indicates a statistically significant result

Participants' Engagement

Nine items measured participants' engagement (see Table 12). For the scale overall, the control group mean score was 4.23 (SD = .55), indicating agreement that participants were engaged. Item scores ranged from 3.33 (SD = .80) for “The DSFC strategic initiatives have created more optimism in Program employees” to 4.71 (SD = .46) for “The work we do is important to me.” The intervention group overall mean score also indicated engagement (M = 4.04, SD = .61). Item scores for the intervention group ranged from 2.92 (SD = .81) for “The DSFC strategic initiatives have created more

optimism in Program employees” to 4.64 (SD = .64) for “The work we do is important to me.” An independent samples t-test showed that the overall and item scores were not significantly different when comparing the control to the intervention group.

Table 12

Engagement: Analysis by Group

Item	Control N = 21		Intervention N = 25		t	df	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Q6. Implementing these initiatives has created more confidence for Program employees.	3.48	0.87	3.08	0.70	1.71	44	.10
Q13. The DSFC strategic initiatives have created more optimism in Program employees.	3.33	0.80	2.92	0.81	1.74	44	.09
Q21. I am highly engaged in the DSFC Program.	4.48	0.60	4.28	0.79	.93	44	.36
Q22. Working in the DSFC Program has a great deal of personal meaning to me.	4.52	0.60	4.44	0.87	.37	44	.71
Q23. I am proud to tell others I work at my organization.	4.57	0.75	4.36	0.86	.88	44	.38
Q24. I feel a strong sense of belonging in my organization.	4.14	1.01	4.16	1.07	-.06	44	.96
Q25. There is a clear link between what I do and the DSFC Program mission.	4.71	0.56	4.44	0.87	1.24	44	.22
Q26. I feel encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things.	4.14	0.96	4.00	1.12	.46	44	.65
Q27. The work we do is important to me.	4.71	0.46	4.64	0.64	.44	44	.66
Overall	4.23	.55	4.04	.61	1.13	44	.26

1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 5 = strongly agree

Interview participants also were asked to report their engagement level in order to evaluate the engagement consequence of the initiative (see Table 13). One participant in each group reported moderate engagement.

Table 13

Interviewees' Self-Reported Engagement Level

Perceived Benefit	Control N = 3	Intervention N = 9
Moderate	1	1
High	2	8

Next, interview participants were asked to identify the reasons for their engagement and indicate the factors that increase and decrease their engagement (see Table 14). The most commonly cited reason was making a difference, reported by two control participants and five intervention participants. One intervention participant commented, “It’s cool to see things being built. It’s a project you can look at. Provides motivation for the next project. The end purpose is to provide a service.” A control group member shared,

About 12 months ago, I was even more engaged by closing in on a \$3 million project for Pine Ridge and \$2 million project for Turtle Mountain. I had a strong motivation for these projects—my goal was to get the money.

Table 14

Interviewees’ Self-Reported Reasons for Engagement

Theme	Control N = 3	Intervention N = 9
Reasons for Engagement		
Making a difference	2	5
Positive relationships with coworkers and population served	2	
Collaborating and working with others		2
Enjoying the work		2
Factors that Increase Engagement		
Sense of achievement		7
Management support		3
Positive working relationships	2	2
Developing others	1	
Factors that Decrease Engagement		
Failure to produce valued results	1	6
Lack of alignment, collaboration, or connection with colleagues	2	3
Lack of professional development		1
Lack of support from upper management	1	

Two control group members but none of the intervention group members attributed their engagement to positive relationships with coworkers and the population served. One participant elaborated:

Personal connection is important. I spent my own money to get it done. Every year I buy boys shoes, coats, foster a personal connection. I bond with the other Tribal Utility Consultants on building cars. Tribal solid waste is different, it's self-implementing, self regulating.

Reasons cited by intervention participants but not control group members included collaborating with others and enjoying the work.

Regarding factors that increase their engagement, seven intervention members but none of the control group members cited sense of achievement, including such things as seeing the positive results of their work efforts, receiving positive feedback, successfully completing their work, and having clear goals and metrics. One participant explained, “the ability to complete construction projects and getting support from your management and seeing the whole project lifecycle. Completing work is what keeps me engaged.” Another shared that it was engaging to “see the direct results and benefits of my/our work across the entire organization.”

The most commonly cited factor within the control group ($n = 2$) was having positive work relationships. One participant shared, “Increas[ing engagement] is about personal involvement. I care about the people that I work with and they care about me. It's all about a strong personal relationship.” Two intervention members also cited this factor.

Participants were then asked to describe the impact of the intervention on their engagement. Intervention participants were asked to report the actual impact of their involvement on their engagement, whereas control group participants were asked to speculate what the impact would be if they had been involved (see Table 15). The majority of the control group ($n = 2$) and the intervention group ($n = 7$) reported that involvement in the project had or would have a positive effect on their engagement.

When asked to explain their response, four intervention participants cited the opportunity to do meaningful work. One participant explained,

My work in that area has been worthwhile. I put a lot of sweat into it, it was a good cause. It does energize me and I see purpose in that. I see advantages of what it is, of following the process. How could it not help?

Another three participants stated that their increased understanding of work processes enhanced their engagement. Control participants offered varying reasons for the predicted impact on their engagement.

Table 15

Actual or Hypothesized Impact of Intervention on Interviewees' Engagement

Theme	Control <i>N</i> = 3	Intervention <i>N</i> = 9
Impact on Engagement Level		
Minimal or none	1	2
Positive effect	2	7
Reasons for Impact (Intervention participants)		
Meaningful work		4
Increased understanding of work processes		3
Increased service and accountability to customers		2
Career advancement		1
Reasons for Anticipated Impact (Control participants)		
Increased understanding of need for change	1	
Improvement processes already implemented by supervisor	1	
Participation increases engagement	1	

Summary

Participants generally responded similarly to the survey items, regardless of whether they participated in the strategic initiatives. Participants believed the strategic initiatives had value and would offer benefits. The participants also reported practicing discretionary change behaviors and having high engagement. However, the intervention group participants were reportedly less confident than control group participants that the DSFC Program and its staff would be able to implement the strategic initiatives. In

addition, intervention group participants did not agree as much as the control group members did that the strategic initiative would increase confidence and optimism within the DSFC employee ranks.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study examined the impact of involvement in a strategic planning initiative on employee perceptions, change behaviors, and engagement within one federal public health agency. Four research questions were examined:

1. What is the impact of involvement in strategic planning initiatives on employees' perceived organizational value of the strategic initiatives?
2. What is the impact of involvement in strategic planning initiatives on employees' perceived personal benefits of the strategic initiatives?
3. What is the impact of involvement in strategic planning initiatives on employees' demonstration of discretionary change behaviors?
4. What is the impact of involvement in strategic planning initiatives on employees' engagement?

This chapter summarizes the research results, provides conclusions and offers practical recommendations based on these results, identifies the limitations of this study, and outlines areas of future research in this topic area.

Conclusions

Impact of involvement on perceived value and benefits of strategic planning initiatives. Study findings indicated no statistically significant difference in the mean scores reported by the control and intervention groups. In addition, both groups rated the perceived value and benefits of the initiatives as high. These findings depart from previous studies, which indicate that involvement in strategic initiatives leads to stronger consensus among participants in the process (Dess & Robinson, 1987; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1989). This departure from past research is likely due to the retrospective nature of this study. The survey portion of this study was deployed in 2014, fully 5 to 7 years after many of these strategic initiatives had been not only implemented but, in many cases,

institutionalized within the organization. Accordingly, the benefits of these initiatives (i.e., more accurate data systems, standardized project planning documents) were experienced by all organizational members, regardless of past strategic initiative involvement. Another possible explanation for the differences between the study findings and past research is disparate definitions of *consensus*: Past researchers defined consensus as the similarity between the chief executive's priorities and those of middle managers; in other words, a superior-to-manager alignment. In this study, consensus refers to agreement among strategic initiative participants on the organizational value and personal benefits of the strategic initiatives. In this use of consensus, it is peer-to-peer alignment.

With regard to the qualitative interview data, any findings and conclusions must be considered highly tentative, based on the small sample size of the control group participants ($n = 3$). Given this condition, data from the post-survey interviews did identify a difference in the perception of relevance: More of the intervention group members believed the strategic initiatives were relevant to current challenges and opportunities faced by the program, compared to control group members. Several implications can be teased out of these data. For DSFC Program leadership, it appears that the deliberately chosen process of employee involvement in strategic initiatives has led to the successful identification and implementation of lasting organizational improvements. Many of the Program employees engaged by this research effort perceived both lasting value as well as benefits from these improvements. Involving a wide cross-section of organizational members may also contribute to a "designed by us" belief system that further reinforces its value and benefits, at least for members present at the time of this effort.

Impact of involvement on discretionary change behavior. Survey data indicate that both the control and intervention groups reported answers ranging from neutrality to agreement regarding their discretionary change behaviors, with no statistically significant difference between the overall group means. This lack of difference again may be explained by the time lag effect of this research effort: Many of the organizational improvements had been in place for a number of years, and organizational members (regardless of their strategy participation) had ample time to develop their own discretionary change behaviors.

These findings show some agreement with past research. Sonenshein and Dholakia (2012) posited that employees are more likely to engage with organizational change when two specific aspects of sense-making occur: the maturation of a strategy worldview and the findings of benefits from the change. A strategy worldview is about context and is defined by the researchers as a “set of beliefs around managers creating an overall plan for the organization that helps lend coherence to change for employees and allows them to understand why they must make adjustments” (p. 3). Survey findings confirmed that both groups may have been on par for strategy worldview. At the same time, positive and clarifying managerial communication is likely one of many factors and certainly not the only factor that contributes to this informed perspective.

However, the premise of this study was that through their work on these teams, strategic initiative participants would have a deeper sense of the strategic context and associated benefits of the organizational strategies they were crafting. This is not borne out by the survey data. Although the interview data appear to confirm the study’s premise, the small sample sizes preclude conclusions. Moreover, intervention group members rated one item (Q14. I am confident the DSFC Program and its staff will be

able to implement the strategic initiatives) significantly lower than control group members. This finding departs from past studies (e.g., Wooldridge & Floyd, 1989), which emphasized the role of the middle manager strategy participant as critical in implementing and selling formulated strategy. One explanation for this finding may be due to the strategy participants' insider perspective. Through a lengthy involvement in the strategy process (a minimum of 12 to 18 months for most DSFC initiative team members), these participants may have accrued more direct experience of organizational challenges and roadblocks than their non-strategy peers. In addition, not all strategic initiative teams were successful; participation on these failed efforts may have negatively biased perceptions of organizational capacity.

Another and more nuanced explanation may relate to the reality gap between strategic aspiration and actual implementation. Many team members, by virtue of their intense sustained effort, may have an idealized view of how their particular program improvement should look as it is being implemented. However, the reality of successful implementation across 12 geographically distinct and relatively autonomous Area Offices may differ. Experiencing or observing this variance, which at times may be significant, could understandably deflate one's perception of confidence and optimism on the part of employees as a result of these strategic initiatives.

An implication of these findings for organizational leadership as well as strategic planning practitioners concerns the weight of managerial communication regarding strategic change. This communication, when done well and done consistently, has been shown to have a positive impact on employees' perception of organizational change (Sonenshein & Dholakia, 2012). In light of the organizational resources required for the creation and management of employee-led strategic teams, it may be worth considering

how these teams can be supplemented (or even replaced, considering the specific circumstances) by strong positive communication around the proposed strategic changes. This researcher did not identify any studies that evaluated these two approaches to improving change behavior.

Impact of involvement on employee engagement. Study findings indicate that both groups had high engagement, with participants elaborating that the ability to make a difference fueled their engagement. The high engagement is consistent with the identity of the public agency employee having chosen to work for a mission-oriented organization (i.e., wanting to enhance the physical wellbeing of American Indians and Alaskan Natives, in the case of DSFC). Consequently, DSFC employees would be expected to have high levels of engagement across the board; this engagement would be activated and reinforced by observing the positive results of the Program's work. These results align with past research, which indicated that intrinsic factors derived from work (e.g., commitment, empowerment, and satisfaction) heighten employees' sense of engagement (Macey et al., 2009; Meyer, Srinivas, Jaydeep, & Topolnytsky, 2007).

Interview data further revealed that the majority of both control and intervention group members perceived that involvement in strategic initiatives would have or has had a positive effect on their engagement. This finding aligns with a theme of engagement research that has identified involvement in decision-making as an antecedent to engagement (Meyer et al., 2007). Study findings also strongly align with the reciprocal exchange theory of employee engagement, which suggests that as employees experience benefits and resources from the organization, they will reciprocate with engagement attitudes and behavior (Saks, 2006). Nevertheless, study findings indicate that several other factors promote engagement, such as employees' personal connection with tribal

communities, their positive working relationships, management support, and developing others. These aspects are not exclusive to (and perhaps may not have been activated through) strategic initiative participation.

It follows that employee engagement is a multivariate construct and, depending on the employee, is activated by a number of unique aspects. It would be a mistake to assume that recruiting employees into strategy formulation and implementation activities will automatically increase engagement for all participants—and in some cases, participation may actually have reverse effects. For example, an employee whose sense of engagement is dependent on frequent interaction with customers may find that a 12-month stint in programmatic design, piloting, and implementation degrades his or her engagement. Conversely, an employee who gains satisfaction from being involved in high-level change may find involvement in strategic activities immensely satisfying. Thus, both leadership and strategic planning practitioners should be wary of a one-size-fits-all assumption with regard to employee strategic participation and its resultant impact on engagement.

Recommendations

The DSFC Program should continue to promote the relevance of past employee-led improvement efforts to all employees, with an emphasis on relevance to front-line success measures. These actions will serve at least two purposes. The first purpose is to strengthen the perceptions of organizational efficacy among past strategy participants, as study results indicated this perception may have been eroded through participation. The second purpose is to tie strategic participation efforts to the front-line measures that appear to be of vital importance to at least a portion of program employees. For instance, explaining and promoting how a more standardized approach to project planning ensures

the expedited delivery of a sanitation system to a tribal community will demonstrate, for all staff, the value of employee-led strategy.

If the DSFC Program enters another round of strategy formulation, the organization should carefully consider the role of employee-led teams. Specifically, each of these teams should be designed for success by identifying progress milestones and deliverables as well as removing, to the extent possible, potential roadblocks and challenges for the team's efforts. This will counteract the degradation in participants' perceptions of organizational capacity identified in the study. In line with the above recommendation, each team's charter should also include a clear statement of how the team's efforts will enhance the front-line engagement factors that appear to play a prominent role for Program staff.

More broadly, the DSFC Program would benefit from identifying the unique set of engagement factors that are activated among its staff and then developing ongoing strategies, including communication efforts that continue to reinforce these factors. While it is clear that being recruited into programmatic improvement efforts activates several engagement variables, this study identified a number of other factors that deserve attention, such as managerial communication, positive relationships with coworkers, direct connections with the tribal customers, and the organizational mission.

These recommendations also hold true for the strategic planning or organizational development practitioner supporting a strategic planning and improvement process. Based on findings from this study, employee-led teams can result in significant and sustained improvement ideas and actions. At the same time, this strategy requires a deliberate design with the organizational client to ensure that a team-centered approach addresses the following aspects: number of teams; resources allocated to these teams;

proactive management of challenges for these teams; and continued communication to team members and the organization at large regarding the front-line and mission relevance of these teams, to name a few. Having said that, the experience of the DSFC Program with this approach, and the opportunities for positive partnering with clients around strategic planning and implementation processes, cannot and should not be underestimated.

Study Limitations

One limitation of this research was that it examined only one organization and its one-time experience with employee-led strategy formulation. In addition, participants' perceptions of engagement may have been influenced by other aspects of the organizational context, aside from strategic planning activities, such as external events or trends. Expanding the research to include multiple organizations would generate more data for analysis and also allow for comparisons across organizations. Ideally, if research were to remain in the public sector, a comparison of employee-led strategy teams at multiple federal agencies would be beneficial.

The second and perhaps more significant limitation relates to the timing of the study. A substantial lag in time was present from the completion of the first and most robust round of strategic participation teams in 2007 to the study in 2014. Typically, a study would be completed closer to the completion of the intervention to garner the most significant impacts as well as guard against the perishability over time of any positive impacts from strategic participation. As previously described, an additional impact from this time lag could relate to the institutionalizing of many of the improvement initiatives prior to the beginning of the study. Once these initiatives were implemented in the organization, all organizational members had the opportunity to experience their benefits,

thereby potentially skewing the perceived value, benefits, and engagement perceptions and behaviors of staff. Future research would benefit from being tied as close to completion of strategic participation as possible. Ideally, a baseline engagement survey could be deployed prior to the start of strategic participation, to be followed by the same survey after strategic participation is completed. To assess perishability of any enhanced engagement, the engagement survey could be redeployed at various intervals for both groups.

The third limitation relates to sample size for the control group interviews. Out of a potential field of 21 control group participants, interviews with only three individuals were completed during this study (compared to 9 of 25 strategy participants being interviewed). As stated, strategy participants were more responsive to interview requests and scheduling, and several of the control group members had left the organization since the survey was deployed. The small sample of three individuals cannot be considered to be representative of the larger group and will show individual bias and skew for any collected data. In alignment with standard research methods and to guarantee statistical significance, it is highly recommended that sample size be increased for both groups to generate more trustworthy results.

Suggestions for Future Research

In general, this area of research provides ample opportunity for additional study. As more and more organizations charter employee-led teams dedicated to organizational improvement, it would be valuable to conduct more research to determine whether and how participation in these teams leads to increased and sustained engagement for those participants. More often than not, employees who participate on such teams are already strong contributors to the organization. If engagement increases among these participants,

recruitment onto strategy teams can factor into organizational retention of these contributors.

More research is needed to confirm or refute the present study's finding that any positive effects on engagement are transitory (evidenced by lack of difference in quantitative data between the study and control groups). Future research could validate this observation by conducting engagement surveys before and after strategic planning activities. Post-activity surveys could be repeated at prescribed intervals to measure any degradation of enhanced engagement effects. There are many compelling reasons for employee led strategy teams, such as increasing the quality and relevance of ideas, peer interactions, innovative thinking, and front-line input. However, if engagement produced by strategy participation is confirmed to be time-bound and perishable, organizations would be advised to reconsider deploying employee-led teams for the purpose of enhancing engagement.

Further research also could determine the relative impact of strategic planning activities on engagement compared to other known antecedents such as managerial support, close working relationships, and customer contact, among others. Such research could assess and compare the impact of these engagement variables on strategic participations and their non-strategy peers.

Finally, research that examines the effect of the so-called insider perspective may prove useful. If it is validated that strategic team members get increased exposure to the challenges and roadblocks within an organization, thereby reducing their confidence in organizational efficacy, this may influence the choice of where, when and how these teams are deployed. Specific research questions into this phenomenon can be included in

both quantitative and qualitative methods that study the experience of strategy team members.

Summary

This study examined the impact of involvement in a strategic planning initiative on employee perceptions, change behaviors, and engagement within one federal public health agency. Using a mixed methods approach consisting a 25-item survey and 10-question interview script, more than 46 agency staff were engaged in this effort. Statistical and content analysis methods were applied to the data for the purpose of generating results.

Study participants from both groups (control and strategic participations) assigned neutral to positive rankings for the perceived value and benefits of the strategic initiatives, discretionary change behaviors, and engagement factors. Program staff expressed strong levels of engagement. Differences in the mean scores for these two groups were not statistically significant, indicating a leveling of perception for these strategic initiatives and the effects of participation on engagement behaviors. One engagement theme among strategy participants was the sense of achievement—this theme may relate to participation in these activities but was also included in a longer list of engagement factors from individuals. Both control and intervention members indicated that strategy participation would have and did increase their levels of engagement, respectively.

Public agencies should carefully consider when, how, and where to deploy employee-led strategy teams. These teams should be designed for success by identifying progress milestones and deliverables as well as removing, as best as possible, potential roadblocks and challenges for the team's efforts.

For organizational leadership at large, as well as for strategic planning practitioners, this research seems to indicate that the involvement of employees in strategy for engagement purposes only should be avoided. Consequently, employee-led designs should leverage the other net benefits of this approach, including front-line input, peer-to-peer interactions, and the opportunity to affect change in a larger scale.

There are many fertile areas of research to be completed in this domain, particularly as organizations continue to invest in employee-led strategy and improvement teams. Additional research includes evaluating if increased engagement from strategy participation is transitory as well as the relative weight of engagement from strategy compared to other, perhaps more powerful, engagement factors.

This researcher leaves the present research effort with an enhanced appreciation for the power of engagement as well as the multiple and complicated factors that contribute to engagement. It is the opinion of this researcher that public agencies will benefit from deepening their understanding and practice around this powerful organizational force, deploying as many strategies as feasible to increase this force for both organizational and individual benefit.

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Appendix A: Study Invitation

Dear DSFC Program Employee:

As some of you may know, I have been a consultant for the DSFC Program over the last 11 years, providing strategic planning support for Headquarters as well as several Area Offices. At the same time, I've also been pursuing a Master's Degree in Organizational Development (MSOD) from Pepperdine University. Obtaining this degree involves, among other activities, completing a thesis project. For this project, I've elected to look at how involvement in the making of organizational strategy does or does not affect employee engagement.

Specifically, I will be conducting an on-line survey as well as select follow-up telephone interviews with DSFC employees that participated on vision element teams. In addition, I will also be collecting data from employees that were not actively involved in these efforts. You have been identified as an individual that fits one of these criteria. The online survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete and will be made available in February 2013. Follow-up telephone interviews will be conducted within a week or two of the survey completion.

Participating in the online survey and a follow-up interview is both voluntary and optional. You may decide to drop out of this study at any time.

The information that will be gathered during this study will remain confidential and all source information (name, Area Office, position) will be excluded from any and all reports and communication associated with this project. I will be the only person who has access to the source information, specific survey information, and interview notes. All results from the online survey and telephone interview notes will be stored securely in my office and, after five years, will be destroyed.

Prior to conducting any research within the DSFC Program, this study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Pepperdine University as well as the Indian Health Service IRB and has been approved by both bodies.

If you are comfortable participating in this study, please sign the attached consent form and return to me via e-mail ([contact information]). Feel free to contact me if you have any questions at [contact information]. You may also contact my research supervisor, Terri Egan, PhD. at Pepperdine University at [contact information] for further information. I appreciate your consideration and look forward to including you in this study.

Sincerely,

Robert T. Ziegler
Candidate, Master of Science in Organizational Development
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The Sanitation Facilities Construction (SFC) program has undergone a decade of strategic planning work by utilizing the expertise of you, the staff of the SFC program to design and implement our change initiatives. Our efforts have been supported by Rob Ziegler of Terracon Consultants. Mr. Ziegler is currently completing a Master of Science in Organizational Development from Pepperdine University and has requested using the DSFC Program and its planning efforts as the subject of his thesis. His thesis revolves around strategic planning and employee engagement.

The research portion of this effort will consist of a 10-15 minute online survey and a potential follow-up telephone interview that would last roughly the same duration.

Using information supplied by DSFC Headquarters, Mr. Ziegler has created a database of potential survey participants and your name is on that database. Shortly after this e-mail, Mr. Ziegler will reach out to each of you with an e-mail that describes the study as well as requests you review, sign and return an informed consent form to him. This study has been approved by both the Pepperdine and IHS Institutional Review Boards (IRBs).

Participating in the online survey and a follow-up interview is both voluntary and optional. The information that will be gathered during this study will remain confidential and all source information (name, Area Office, position) will be excluded from any and all reports and communication associated with this study. Mr. Ziegler will be the only person who has access to the source information, specific survey information, and interview notes.

In advance, I'm hoping that you will be able to make the time to participate in this study. Mr. Ziegler will be providing Program leadership with a summary of his findings and I'm confident information from this study will help inform our future rounds of strategy making, implementation, and efforts to engage all of you in the continuing improvements of the DSFC Program.

Thanks,

Ron

Ronald C. Ferguson, P.E.
RADM, USPHS
Assistant Surgeon General
Director, Division of Sanitation Facilities Construction Indian Health Service
[contact information]

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Study Title: Exploring the Relationship between Involvement in Strategic Planning Activities and Employee Engagement

Purpose: The purpose of this study to examine the role that involvement in strategic planning activities does/does not impact the extent and degree of employee engagement. This study is being conducted as part of the requirement for a Master of Science in Organizational Development degree through Pepperdine University, under the supervision of Terri Egan, PhD. If you have any questions or concerns please confer with the researcher (Robert Ziegler; [contact information]) or you may contact Dr. Egan directly at [contact information].

Procedures: Participation in this study is on a volunteer basis. Volunteers will participate in an on-line survey and follow-up telephone interviews will be conducted with select participants. The on-line survey (distributed via SurveyMonkey) will require approximately 15 minutes to complete. The telephone interview will require approximately 30 minutes to complete; these interviews will be scheduled via e-mail after completion of the on-line survey.

Participation: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. For research purposes, the DSFC Program supports the time required to complete the on-line survey and telephone interview. The researcher will make every effort to honor this support and make the data collection as efficient as possible. Each participant has the right to remove themselves from the study at any time for any reason. Should you choose to volunteer, you may refuse to answer any question or portion of a question for any reason without risk. Choosing not to participate will have no consequence to you.

Confidentiality: All personal identification information collected during this study will remain confidential. Individual responses to the survey will be coded, rather than assigned to individual names. In addition, all information shared during the telephone interview portion of this study will remain confidential. As a result of these safeguards, your name will remain confidential and other DSFC Program staff will not have access to any specific information.

I understand the parameters of the study and agree to voluntarily participate in the study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix C: Survey

Answer scale for survey was the following Likert Scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither disagree or agree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

1. I feel well informed by management of DSFC Program strategic improvement initiatives.
2. For the DSFC Program to remain successful in its mission, Program-wide strategic initiatives and changes are critical.
3. Strategic initiatives and change enable the Program to use more resources efficiently and effectively.
4. Today's environment requires that we continuously improve our Program.
5. DSFC strategic initiatives will increase our ability to complete sanitation projects on time, on budget, and with appropriate scope.
6. Implementing these initiatives has created more confidence for Program employees.
7. DSFC strategic initiatives will improve our relationships with our tribal customers and partners.
8. DSFC strategic initiatives will improve our relationships with our agency partners.
9. DSFC strategic initiatives will improve the Program's ability to achieve positive health outcomes for the AI/AN communities we serve.
10. I believe the DSFC strategic initiatives are the right changes for the organization.
11. The DSFC Program will improve as a result of the current strategic initiatives.
12. I feel confident in the future of the DSFC Program.
13. The DSFC strategic initiatives have created more optimism in Program employees.
14. I am confident the DSFC Program and its staff will be able to implement the strategic initiatives.
15. I feel confident that the DSFC strategic initiatives will enhance my own effectiveness.
16. I have been able to comply with the changes required by the DSFC strategic initiatives.
17. I have adjusted the way I perform my tasks as a result of the DSFC strategic initiatives.
18. I speak positively about DSFC strategic initiatives to my work colleagues.
19. I speak positively about the DSFC strategic initiatives with our tribal and agency partners.
20. I try to overcome others' resistance to the changes resulting from the DSFC strategic initiatives.
21. I am highly engaged in the DSFC Program.
22. Working in the DSFC Program has a great deal of personal meaning to me.
23. I am proud to tell others I work at my organization.
24. I feel a strong sense of belonging in my organization.
25. There is a clear link between what I do and the DSFC Program mission.
26. I feel encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things.
27. The work we do is important to me.

Appendix D: Telephone Interview Script

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this telephone interview. As you are aware, this study is my Masters Research for the Pepperdine MSOD program. I have four questions for this interview and estimate the interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. While I will be taking notes from this interview, please rest assured that the research study design and confidentiality process guarantees that your comments will remain both confidential and anonymous. Do you have any questions before we start?

For strategy participants only:

1. Briefly tell me about your experience in the DSFC improvement initiatives.
 - What was your involvement?
 - What did you like, if anything? What didn't you like, if anything?
2. How did it affect you, if at all?
 - How did it affect your attitudes or behaviors about your work, if at all?
 - How did it affect your attitudes or behaviors about your organization, if at all?

For all participants:

3. What is your understanding of how the DSFC improvement initiatives (PMPro, data systems, etc.) came into existence? (*strategy worldview*)
4. Do you feel these improvement initiatives are relevant to the challenges and opportunities that currently exist for the DSFC Program? (*strategy worldview*)
5. Do you see or personally experience any current or future benefits from these improvement initiatives that will make you more effective in your job? (*benefits finding*)
6. Engagement in your work deals with things like having strong motivation to perform well at work, having a sense of purpose and passion for your work, and feeling a personal connection to your team and organization. On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high), to what degree do you feel engaged in your work? (*engagement consequence*) Please explain.
7. What do you believe most *INCREASES* your work engagement?
8. What do you believe most *DECREASES* your work engagement?

For strategy participants only:

9. What effect, if any, do you believe involvement in the DSFC improvement initiatives had on your engagement with your work? Please explain.

For control group participants only:

10. What effect, if any, do you think involvement in the DSFC improvement initiatives would have had on your engagement with your work? Please explain.